

**LOCKHEED AIRCRAFT CORPORATION**

BURBANK, CALIFORNIA 91520

27 September 1976

**C. L. JOHNSON**  
SENIOR ADVISOR

My dear Mr. Secretary:

I noted with great interest your letter in the September 27 issue of Aviation Week and Space Technology in regard to the Backfire bomber and its evaluation by United States sources.

I have made studies of this aircraft starting early 1971 in connection with our development work here at the Lockheed Advanced Development Projects (Skunk Works) where we build advanced reconnaissance aircraft such as the SR-71 and U-2. From the earliest data that was given by our intelligence sources, I undertook continuing studies trying to evaluate its capabilities with particular reference to the Backfire's capability of attacking the United States and what our air defense solution would be. I am attaching a copy of my original performance estimate compared to that of the Air Force Foreign Technology Division, and also to the projected Air Force B-1 bomber.

On August 24 I was called in Washington as a member of a committee to reevaluate later data which we had obtained on the Soviet Backfire. I am attaching a copy of my personal comments at the end of that meeting in August.

I have been concerned that our intelligence committee as a whole has for the past five years overestimated the capabilities of the Backfire based on my experience in the design and construction of over 40 types of aircraft. Even though the Soviets have redesigned the production aircraft to overcome some of the initial structural and aerodynamic problems, I strongly feel that it is a mediocre aircraft in terms of a good intercontinental bomber. Just as our B-1 requires a very substantial refueling fleet, the Backfire without this adjunct has no important intercontinental bombing capability

State Dept. review completed

to speak of. It would however, be extremely dangerous to the NATO countries, the area around the Mediterranean, and a distinct threat to our surface Navy.

We continue to overestimate the Russian capability in the performance of their aircraft, not only with the Backfire type, but also the Foxbat, which fortunately will soon be put into proper category of performance. The most important thing that the Soviets have which poses a threat to the United States and the free world is a total dedication to producing advanced systems rather than just arguing about the cost and usefulness. There are over ten times as many Foxbats as SR-71's and even with a firm commitment to produce the B-1 would not equal the Backfire's numbers in service for many years.

Congratulations on the results of your work on your recent trip to South Africa in trying to avoid the catastrophe which could happen there so easily.

Sincerely,

Clarence L. Johnson

The Honorable Henry A. Kissinger  
Secretary of State  
Department of State  
Washington, D.C. 20520

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**IMMEDIATE**

Form 3-65 160c

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SECRETARIAT

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2	DDCI	X	
3	D/DCI/IC	X	
4	DDS&T	X	
5	DDI	X	
6	DDA		
7	DDO		
8	D/DCI/NI	X (Attn: Messrs.	
9	GC	Lehman	
10	LC		
11	IG		
12	Compt		
13	D/Pers		
14	D/S		
15	DTR		
16	Asst/DCI		
17	AO/DCI		
18	C/IPS		
19	DCI/SS		
20	D/OWI/	X (Attn: Mr. Hineman -- for	
21	DDS&T	your 1800 meeting with DCI)	
22	SA/DCI	X (For DCI's Backfire	
SUSPENSE		file)	
		Date	

Remarks:

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October 12

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THE WHITE HOUSE  
WASHINGTON

Executive Registry

76-3720

TO: GEORGE BUSH

FROM:

\_\_\_\_\_ For Direct Reply

\_\_\_\_\_ For Draft Response

XX \_\_\_\_\_ For Your Information

\_\_\_\_\_ Please Advise

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FOURTH REGISTRY

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